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Articles in Today's Clips Friday, February 16, 2007

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Group Files Suit Against State Over Foster Care

Feb 16, 2007 06:41 AM EST



Michigan needs to do more to protect children in the state's foster care system. That's the accusation from a children's rights organization. It filed a lawsuit against the state this week, and they have sued states before, like New jJrsey, Tennessee, Mississippi and now Michigan.

In their lawsuit against the state, children's rights wants a lighter caseload for Michigan's foster care caseworkers. They want Michigan to place more foster care children in permanent homes, and the suit also claims the Department of Human Services has failed to meet the health care needs of foster children.

Spokesperson: "They are putting children at risk every day. We have a lawsuit to reform the states' broken child welfare system that is hurting children in foster care."

The lawsuit also lists foster children identified by first name that the system has failed, like Lisa J., a 9-year-old girl sexually abused by her foster father, or Dwayne B., a 7 year old who has been placed in eight different homes since he was a toddler.

Spokesperson: "These are not a typical experience, this is what happens to children when they go into child welfare in Michigan, when they become foster children or children of the state. The state is not taking care of them."

The advocacy group says, in the end, they want the state to find children loving homes where they can grow and prosper. The Michigan Department of Human Services and the governor's office declined to talk with us on camera about the lawsuit. A spokesman for the attorney general's office says they are currently researching the claims. A judge has not set a court date yet for this case.



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'CASA Blanca' coming April 21

Thursday, February 15, 2007 9:54 AM EST

CASSOPOLIS - On Saturday, April 21, Cass County CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) will be hosting its first "CASA Blanca" event.

It will be a silent and live auction with many exciting items up for grabs which have been donated by both private parties and generous local businesses.

The event will be at Orchard Hills Country Club in Buchanan from 6 to 9 p.m. with hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar.

There will also be live entertainment.

Tickets cost \$20 per person and can be purchased from either CASA board members or CASA staff members.

Cass County CASA is a non-profit agency of trained volunteers from the community who are appointed by the court to advocate for abused and neglected children in Cass County.

Currently there are 152 children in the foster care system in Cass County who would benefit from having a CASA volunteer. You can help these children by attending this event, thereby donating to the CASA program.

All contributions are tax-deductible.

For more information on tickets for this event, or the Cass County CASA program, contact Lisa Schmidt, CASA program director, at (269) 445-4431 or by e-mail at casscocasa@yahoo.com.



Legal team on Holland case to hold discussion

February 15, 2007

By JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Judges and lawyers who worked on the Ricky Holland murder case will speak about the high-profile trial of the boy's adoptive parents during a roundtable discussion at Cooley Law School next week.

The event in Lansing, which is free and open to the public, will begin at noon Feb. 23 at the school's Temple Building, 217 S. Capitol, Cooley communications director Terry Carella said today.

Each of the participants "will have about 10 minutes to give what their role was and some of their perspectives and then we're going to open up to questions from the audience," Carella said.

Participating will be Ingham County Circuit Court Judge Paula Manderfield, who presided over the trial last fall of Ricky's adoptive mother Lisa Holland and who took the guilty plea of Lisa's husband Tim Holland, and 55th District Court Judge Rosemarie Aquilina, who handled the couple's preliminary examination last March and April.

The Hollands, who had lived in Jackson and near Williamston, claimed in July 2005 that their 7-year-old foster-adoptive son Ricky had run away. Six months later, Tim Holland led police to the boy's body in a swamp south of Dansville, saying his wife had killed the boy with two blows from a small hammer.

After Tim Holland pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and testified against his wife, Manderfield sentenced him to 30-60 years in prison. A jury found Lisa Holland guilty of first-degree murder. She is serving her sentence of life in prison without parole.

Also speaking at the roundtable are Assistant Ingham County Prosecutor Mike Ferency, who prosecuted the couple; Tim Holland defense attorneys Frank Reynolds and Scott Mertens, and Lisa Holland's attorneys Andrew Abood and Mike Nichols.

The discussion will be moderated by Cooley Law School professor Anthony Flores.

For more information, go to the law school's Web site, www.cooley.edu or call 517-371-5140 anytime.

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Mental exam ordered for mom of slain girls

Defense attorney says he's having trouble working with accused woman

By Chad Halcom
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A Macomb Township woman charged in the killings of her two young daughters will undergo an examination of her mental state before court hearings proceed.

Jennifer Anne Kukla, 30, appeared Thursday at 41A District Court for a preliminary exam on two counts of first-degree murder in the Feb. 4 stabbing deaths of Alexandra Marie Kukla, 8, and half-sister, Ashley Kukla, 5. But defense attorney Steven Freers requested a delay so that Kukla could undergo examination first at the Center for Forensic Psychiatry in Ypsilanti.

Freers indicated Thursday he was having some difficulty working with Kukla and helping to prepare a defense in court -- a criteria for determining competency to stand trial.

"It's not (going) real well," he said. "She (Kukla) doesn't seem to have a real solid contact with reality."

Relatives of Kukla attended her court hearing Thursday, but declined to comment about the proceedings afterward. A sister of the defendant, Elizabeth Lawrie, called "Jenny I love you," to Kukla as Macomb County sheriff's deputies led her away.

The challenge to her mental fitness is little surprise, as experts have already said that insanity was Kukla's most likely defense if the case goes to trial. Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith said his office anticipated the defense move and already his staff is researching various mental illness claims to help prepare its own case.

"The earlier the better, in terms of getting this issue addressed before the case goes forward. Especially since the request for a forensic (exam) is often the first step toward the insanity defense," Smith explained.

"We've already been contacting and lining up some of the finest experts in this field who could take the stand for our case. The facts aren't really in dispute here. Proving she's the one who did this versus someone else doing it isn't really the dispute either. Proving this case is going to come down to proving her sanity."

Alexandra and Ashley, who would have turned 6 next week, died Feb. 4 of multiple stab wounds to the neck region, as did three family dogs and a pet mouse. The killings occurred at the Kukla family's modest mobile home on Chevalier Drive.

The girls' mother remains at the Macomb County Jail without bond awaiting the preliminary exam. District Judge Douglas Shepherd agreed to an adjournment Thursday in that hearing. No new date is scheduled, but officials have estimated most cases going for forensic examination lately take between six weeks and three months to return to court.

A state-appointed psychiatric specialist will examine Kukla both for her competency -- ability to understand the charges against her and assist an attorney in preparing her defense -- and culpability, or her ability to discern right and wrong or control her behavior at the time of the crime.

Smith said he is confident that Kukla will prove competent and culpable because she has been able to answer investigators' questions, and her sister Lauren Kukla reported in a 911 call to police that the defendant believed she was going "to the depths of hell" for her actions -- implying that she understands the moral nature of them.

In a markedly similar case, a jury in the Houston area found Andrea Yates not guilty by reason of insanity last summer in her second trial for murder in the deaths of her five children. She drowned them in a bathtub in 2001. In that case, the defense said Yates killed her children in an act of love to save their souls from eternal damnation.

"But the difference there is, (Yates) had a specific illness ... with the claim of postpartum depression. It was something the jury could hang their hat on," Smith said, noting that Yates' youngest child was not quite 6 months old.

"You can't really argue postpartum in a case where your youngest child is about to turn 6 years old (like Ashley Kukla). There's not a category of mental illness we've found that fits in this case."

Police and prosecutors claim Kukla, a single mother and a former associate manager at a local McDonald's, took a set of four large knives and fatally stabbed both her children and the pets in the early Sunday morning hours.

She then allegedly remained in the house some 11 hours until sister Lauren Kukla stopped by the home to check on her welfare. There the sister found an open door and Kukla emerging from inside to tell her she'd harmed the girls, prompting a call to 911 around 6 p.m.

If convicted as charged, Kukla would face mandatory life in prison without parole.

Kukla had briefly lost custody of her children four years ago in an environmental neglect case because of living conditions at her home, officials said. The mother then met the requirements to be reunited with her children.

Getting financial support for the two kids may have been a tougher matter. Paul Hein, father of Alexandra Kukla, was ordered jailed 30 days in lieu of \$2,250 for non-payment of child support.

But jail records indicate Hein, who went into custody Dec. 18, obtained his release on Dec. 20 by furnishing the money. That payment was to go to the Macomb County Friend of the Court to be processed through the state Disbursement Unit in Lansing, then forwarded to the Kukla family. Officials could not confirm that payment had reached the mother.

The crime has led to donations from the community into a bank fund to pay the children's funeral costs and erect a memorial. Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel said the fund has reached nearly \$30,000 in contributions and he has been asking residents who still wish to give to donate to another charity in the girls' names.

Officials believe enough will be left over after the funeral expenses last weekend to erect a playscape or special memorial in honor of the slain girls at Ojibwa Elementary School where they were students.

"I was really surprised. I never expected the giving and caring to be quite this overwhelming from the community," Hackel said. "But I guess I should have realized how people are in Macomb County."

Click here to return to story:

http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/021607/loc_kukla001.shtml



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Man held in 2nd infant abuse case

Father accused of injuring girl was convicted as juvenile in fatal shaking case

Friday, February 16, 2007

BY SUSAN L. OPPAT

News Staff Reporter

A Pittsfield Township man, convicted as a juvenile in 2001 of manslaughter for shaking his infant brother to death, was jailed Thursday night on charges that he allegedly shook his baby daughter hard enough to injure her brain.

Everege Dickens, who turned 21 and was discharged as a ward of the Wayne County Juvenile Court on Feb. 3, was charged with first-degree child abuse last month. He is accused of allegedly shaking his 11-month-old daughter on Oct. 6, 2006, while the baby's 17-year-old mother attended high school.

Assistant Washtenaw

County Prosecutor Patricia Reiser told Chief 14A-1 District Judge J. Cedric Simpson that the baby suffered hemorrhaging in both eyes and subdural hematomas, or blood clots, on both sides of her brain. Those injuries are consistent with "abusive head trauma," or shaken-baby syndrome,

Reiser said.

Dickens was scheduled to undergo preliminary examination Thursday, but failed to pay a private attorney to appear, and a public defender was appointed to represent him. Dickens was free on a personal bond, but Reiser asked Simpson to jail him because a magistrate who approved the bond had not been told about the previous case.

Assistant Washtenaw Public Defender Carl Macpherson argued against jailing Dickens because he said there are no similarities in the injuries to the child in the previous case and the current case. When Dickens was 15, Macpherson said, Dickens was left home alone all night with his 9-month-old brother while their mother went to work. Dickens was overwhelmed by a crying baby, Macpherson said. In the current case, another person in the house reported the baby had not been crying.

Dickens told police and doctors that Arelle fell off a bed while he was in the shower.

"A fall from a bed would not have caused the injuries this 11-month-old suffered," Reiser countered. She noted that an MRI of the baby's brain also revealed previous injuries.

In ruling that Dickens should be jailed, Simpson noted "striking similarities" between the cases. He also cited the fact that Dickens is on probation for malicious destruction of a building and receiving and concealing stolen property. He set a \$15,000 cash bond, and a new court date on Feb. 22.

Reiser said that although it appears the baby has recovered from its injuries, it won't be clear for some time whether she suffered permanent brain damage. She is living with families members, Reiser said.

During the court hearing Thursday, Reiser complained that Wayne County Juvenile Court caseworkers were aware that Dickens was living with a 17-year-old girl and their infant daughter. But when Pittsfield Township Police and Washtenaw County protective services workers tried to talk to the Wayne County officials about why they allowed him to live with an infant, Reiser said, Wayne County officials refused to talk to them.

"Shame on the caseworker for allowing him to be in a house with a baby," Reiser told the judge. "It blows my mind that they allowed that to happen."

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Article published Feb 15, 2007

Couple sentenced in child abuse case

By Tiffany L. Parks
Staff Writer

A township couple has been sentenced to prison time and probation for their roles in abusing their infant son last year.

The child's father, Steven Michael Szyszkowski, will serve up to four years in prison for second-degree child abuse. Szyszkowski, 26, originally faced up to 15 years. He was sentenced earlier this month after pleading no contest to seriously injuring his five-week-old son in December.

Doctors determined the child, who was placed in foster care, suffered various injuries, including nine broken bones.

The child's mother, Jayme Beth Stratton, was sentenced to two years probation in late January.

While police didn't believe that Stratton, 36, struck the child, they said she maintained an environment of abuse.

The couple were arrested after police received an anonymous tip about the abuse.

"All of us have said that caller saved this baby's life," said Canton Detective Rick Pomorski. "This was a prime example of how people should act when they suspect abuse."

Even if a child shows no outward signs of abuse, Pomorski said people should follow their instincts and alert police if they feel a child is being hurt.

"People should never think they're wasting our time or feel guilty about calling," he said.

The couple's son, who had broken toes and a broken tibia, was expected to make a full recovery.

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The Daily Telegram

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FRIDAY FEBRUARY 16, 2007 Last modified: *Thursday, February 15, 2007 9:26 AM EST*

Payment for child sex abuse victim

Wayne Derr must pay \$500,000 to the young boy Derr was convicted of sexually abusing.

By [Dennis Pelham](#)

Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN — An Adrian man who served a jail sentence for sexually abusing an 11-year-old boy several years ago is now saddled with a court order that he pay his victim \$500,000 in compensation and additional punishment.

The judgment in a civil lawsuit against 59-year-old Wayne Earl Derr was accepted Wednesday in Lenawee County Circuit Court.

It is rare for victims of sex crimes to sue their abusers, but it should not be, said attorney Stanley Sala of Adrian, representing the victim in the Derr case.

“People should be accountable financially as well as criminally,” Sala said.

The boy whom Derr befriended and then secretly abused over a one-year period in 2002 and 2003 has suffered serious psychological trauma from the experience, Sala said, and has ongoing expenses for counseling and treatment.

“They should be made to pay the bill for any expense their victims have for the rest of their lives,” Sala said.

Derr does not have insurance that will cover the civil judgment approved Wednesday by Judge Timothy P. Pickard.

“It’s going to hang over his head for the rest of his life,” Sala said. The civil award cannot be discharged by bankruptcy, he said. Sala said he hopes to see Derr eventually complete payment of the entire award.

The lawsuit was filed after Derr was prosecuted in 2003.

The complaint said Derr made deliberate efforts to win the trust of the boy and his family then showed him pornographic movies and sexually abused him.

Sala won a summary disposition motion in August based on Derr’s guilty plea to assault with intent to commit second-degree criminal sexual conduct and full confession of the crime. He served an 11-month jail sentence and was placed on probation for five years.

The judgment awarded Wednesday includes a punishment of \$125,000 in exemplary damages in addition to \$175,000 in damages for the assaults and \$200,000 compensation for past and future damages.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--



Perry to be freed today; family is thrilled

Oak Park teacher awaits new trial in sex case

February 16, 2007

BY JOHN WISELY and L.L. BRASIER

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

Almost five months after a jury convicted him of molesting two young boys, former Oak Park kindergarten teacher James Perry is expected to be released from the Oakland County Jail today to await a new trial.

Perry, 33, smiled and nodded Thursday afternoon when Oakland County Circuit Judge Denise Langford Morris agreed to release him. He mouthed the words "thank you" to his father and stepmother as he was led out of the courtroom packed with some of his supporters and returned to his cell.

The ruling was the latest legal victory for Perry, who has spent the past five months in jail on a sexual assault conviction that the judge threw out last week. Langford Morris ruled that two new witnesses found after the verdict could have changed the outcome of his September trial and to let his conviction stand would be a "miscarriage of justice."

Perry's immediate release was held up Thursday while his family arranged bond and officials arranged to have him outfitted today with an electronic tether.

Perry's father, Ed Perry, said he was looking forward to his son's release.

"They snatch your life and squeeze you and there's nothing you can do about it," Ed Perry said. "We're extremely thrilled."

Perry's minister and some friends and colleagues were in the courtroom to hear the arguments.

"We're looking forward -- some day soon -- to having him over for dinner," said Michalene Payok, whose husband, Ronald Payok, supervised Perry for seven years at Lessenger Elementary School.

Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Andrea Dean opposed Perry's release, arguing he is a pedophile who poses a threat to children. One jury has convicted him and there's no reason to think a second jury wouldn't do the same, Dean said.

"It's not evident that he's not going to be convicted again," Dean said.

Perry's attorney Robyn Frankel disagreed.

"There's no conviction," Frankel said. "The conviction has been vacated. The court has already made a finding that to sustain the conviction would be a miscarriage of justice."

Among the conditions of Perry's bond in his expected release today are: He must wear an electronic tether; he cannot be around minors unless their parents are present; and he must not return to his Ferndale home, which abuts a school.

Perry plans to stay at his grandfather's home in Berkley.

Perry's case began Oct. 12, 2005, when a new kindergarten student enrolled at Key Elementary School, where Perry taught. The boy, then 5, later testified that within two hours of his arrival, Perry snatched him and a 4-year-old classmate from a supervised lunch line, dragged them to an empty classroom and forced them to perform oral sex.

Two weeks later, Oakland County prosecutors closed the case and declined to charge Perry after the second child denied being attacked.

But they reopened it in February 2006 after a management shake-up in the prosecutor's office. This time, the 4-year-old's mother told police her son now backed the first boy's account.

Perry was charged with four counts of criminal sexual conduct. The case rested almost entirely on the shifting accounts of the boys and their mothers.

One boy was never able to identify Perry in court.

A jury deliberated five hours before convicting Perry on all counts Sept. 20. Perry was sent immediately to jail to await sentencing.

But his lawyers immediately raised questions about the verdict, citing two witnesses who never testified at trial. A student teacher and a special-education aide, who worked in the classroom where the boys said they were attacked, submitted sworn affidavits to the court saying the classroom remained occupied throughout the school day and the attacks couldn't have happened there.

Langford Morris reviewed the statements and trial transcripts before ruling Feb. 7 that their testimony constituted new evidence that might have changed the trial's outcome.

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Judge gives 13 citizens their due

February 16, 2007

BY BRIAN DICKERSON

FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Ever since I began arguing in this space that teacher James Perry's conviction for the molestation of two kindergartners at his Oak Park elementary school should be set aside, people curious about the case have been asking me a question:

Why, they all want to know, am I so convinced that Perry is innocent?

My answer is always the same: I'm *not* convinced. Not yet.

And I wouldn't presume to say that the 12 Oakland County jurors who found Perry guilty of sexual assault were wrong.

What I know beyond a reasonable doubt is this: I (and every other Free Press reader who has followed the superb work of my colleagues L.L. Brasier, John Wisely and Suzette Hackney) know more about what happened at Key Elementary School on Oct. 12, 2005, than any of the jurors who voted to convict Perry last fall.

This is so not because jurors were stupid or inattentive, but because the people who investigated the allegations against Perry and prosecuted him failed to do their jobs.

Dereliction of duty

It was Oak Park Police Detective Erik Dolan's job to interview all the witnesses who might reasonably be expected to have information about the alleged assaults. But he never spoke to two teacher's aides who were present in the classroom where Perry's accusers said they were attacked.

It was the obligation of Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca and Assistant Prosecutor Andrea Dean to assure that the jurors heard all the relevant evidence before they were dispatched to decide Perry's fate. They, too, fell down on the job.

The resulting insult to justice was twofold: Perry was denied a fair trial, and 12 jurors who gave up a week of their lives were denied the opportunity to participate meaningfully in one of the most important rites of citizenship.

That is really the only conclusion Oakland County Circuit Judge Denise Langford Morris reached in her Feb. 7 decision to throw out Perry's conviction and order that he be retried before a new jury.

Protecting the public

No one makes the right call every time. What matters is how people in power react when errors or critical omissions are brought to their attention.

The reasonable course for Gorcyca in Perry's case would have been to welcome the discovery of additional witnesses. One needn't believe in Perry's innocence to recognize that providing jurors with all the relevant evidence is in everyone's interest.

But that's not what happened here. In fact, what's most disturbing about Perry's case is not what police and prosecutors failed to do before his conviction, but the lengths to which they've gone to suppress the new evidence and sabotage a new trial.

I'm not sure Perry represents a danger to anyone, but I'm glad that Langford Morris has taken precautions to safeguard the public until a new jury renders its verdict.

Prosecutors who care more about winning convictions than doing justice represent a danger to everyone, and I'm grateful for Langford Morris' insistence that they, too, must be held to account.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Mother faces sex assault charges

Police accuse woman of bizarre punishment

Friday, February 16, 2007

BY AMALIE NASH

News Staff Reporter

A Manchester mother was ordered to stand trial this week on charges of first-degree criminal sexual conduct after her 7-year-old daughter allegedly told a neighbor about a bizarre punishment involving toothpaste.

The 33-year-old mother is accused of putting toothpaste on her finger and inserting it into her daughter's rectum as a form of discipline, said Washtenaw County Sheriff's Cmdr. Dave Egeler. It occurred on two

occasions since December and was reported to police last month after the girl confided in an adult neighbor, Egeler said.

Police contacted child protective services workers to investigate, Egeler said. The mother was jailed and arraigned Feb. 2. She remains at the Washtenaw County Jail on \$30,000 bond.

The mother faces two charges of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, a felony punishable by up to life in prison. She is not being named by The News to protect the identity of her daughter.

Egeler said the woman apparently got the idea after communicating on the Internet with a California man who claimed to have used that form of punishment on his three daughters when they misbehaved. "We've

contacted authorities in California with all the information we have so they can determine if that information is accurate," Egeler said.

The mother will next appear in court for a pre-trial hearing March 27. Her attorney could not be reached Thursday.

The girl and her 15-year-old brother were turned over to their father.

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Detroit Free Press

Across the nation

February 16, 2007

NORWALK, OHIO: Parents in cage case get 2 years

A couple who forced some of their 11 adopted special-needs children to sleep in cages were sentenced to two years in prison each for child endangering Thursday. The parents said they were only trying to keep the kids safe. Authorities removed the children, then 1 to 14, in September 2005 from Michael and Sharen Gravelle's home in Wakeman. The couple lost custody in March.



Muskegon Chronicle

Authorities to decide where little girl will live

Friday, February 16, 2007

By Lisa Medendorp

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Everyone wants what's best for Marisa.

The 5-year-old girl, discovered alone with her deceased mother Sunday, is in the temporary custody of the Michigan Department of Human Services, according to Muskegon County's Family Court. Confidentiality laws prevent authorities from saying where Marisa is currently staying.

Tina M. Tietz, 39, was found dead in their Fruitland Township home. A preliminary finding from an autopsy indicates she died from bacterial meningitis.

Marisa Tietz, whose name initially was released by authorities as "Marissa," was alone for an undetermined number of days with her mother's body at 5700 W. Michillinda. Authorities said they cannot yet say how long the girl was alone.

The little girl rummaged through cupboards and anywhere else she could find food to eat. The interior of the home was in shambles when police forced entry after a friend, Michelle Schnotala, went to the residence. She was concerned because Tina Tietz had not returned messages left on her cell phone.

Schnotala, 39, said she last spoke to her friend the night of Feb. 3, eight days before Tina Tietz was found, and she had complained of a severe headache and earache.

Now it will be up to Family Court to determine where Marisa will live.

A preliminary hearing held Monday left the child in the temporary care of DHS. A pre-hearing conference has been set for Feb. 23.

Paul Wishka, deputy family division court administrator, said with Marisa's mother dead and the man believed to be her biological father in prison, the state filed a petition with the court indicating the child is "without proper custody and guardianship."

Marisa and her mother lived alone in the house.

Because of that context, the child needed to be protected, he said. "The court takes jurisdiction and there is going to be an investigation into circumstances regarding the family," Wishka said.

Marisa has a number of relatives, including her maternal grandparents, Jerry and Linda Miller of Mears.

Any number of things could happen at the Feb. 23 conference, according to Wishka.

For example, the case could be set for a hearing (technically a trial). DHS could also continue to have the responsibility of making sure the child is cared for.

It may also be decided the Muskegon County Prosecutor's Office and DHS might feel there is no need for the court to be involved. It might be "that the child has a relative who can step forward and care for her," Wishka said.

Muskegon County Prosecutor Tony Tague said his office represents DHS in Family Court custody matters.

"Everyone's concern is to ensure the safety of the child and to see that she is placed in a safe productive environment," he said. "The court and my office attempt to place a child with relatives whenever possible."

Wishka added: "We want to put children in the most family-like environment. Ideally, it's with a relative who has the ability to protect and nurture the child."

No immediate funeral service is planned for Tina Tietz, who is originally from Hart. A graveside service will be held in the spring. Arrangements are being handled by Harris Funeral Home in Shelby.

Tina Tietz has another daughter, Jenna, 15, who is living with her ex-husband Norman Tietz in the Montague area, authorities said.

Marisa's father is identified on a Muskegon County Sheriff's Department report as Robert Michael Collins, 26. Collins is currently at Earnest C. Brooks Correctional Facility in Muskegon. He is serving a long sentence for the 2003 armed robbery of a Norton Shores gas station/convenience store and the attempted robbery while armed of a Muskegon Heights liquor store.

Both incidents occurred the same day and the prosecutor's office said at the time they were drug-related.

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February 15, 2007

REINHART WARNS OF MEDICAID CUTS WITHOUT TAXES

Unless the Legislature adopts Governor Jennifer Granholm's proposed new taxes, or some other new revenue source, either reimbursements to doctors and hospitals or benefits to recipients will have to be cut in the Medicaid system, Paul Reinhart, head of the system, told the House Health Policy Committee on Thursday.

The state is spending \$8 billion on Medicaid for the current fiscal year, and a similar amount is proposed for the 2007-08 budget.

"If the Legislature needs to cut the general fund by \$1 billion, it would be hard to hold Medicaid harmless," he said, anticipating it would mean cuts in both eligibility and benefits.

Mr. Reinhart said the state had room to cut eligibility for both children and adults. The state provides coverage for children up to 200 percent of poverty, for the elderly and disabled up to 100 percent of poverty and for childless adults up to 35 percent of poverty. All of those limits are beyond the federal requirements.

"We could lower our eligibility (for children) to 150 percent of poverty, but that few hundred million in costs don't go away," he said. Instead, more of those people would be treated in local hospitals as uninsured.

Cutting eligibility for benefits for adults would put Michigan further behind other states, Mr. Reinhart said. "Our eligibility is very low relative to comparable states," he said. Only Indiana among similar-population states ends coverage for adults at a lower threshold than the 35 percent of poverty Michigan uses. And of the nine states Mr. Reinhart showed, only Michigan and Indiana cut off benefits before a person reached the poverty line.

But Michigan's spending per beneficiary was less in fiscal year 2002-03 per beneficiary than any neighboring state, Mr. Reinhart said. He attributed the low costs to the use of HMOs for most recipients and the state's purchasing pool for prescription drugs.

Reimbursements to physicians and hospitals also could be cut, but Mr. Reinhart said the state currently is at half of what Medicare pays for similar services, which is the standard for reimbursement. For an office visit, private insurers would pay about \$100, Medicare would pay about \$70 and Michigan Medicaid pays \$35, he said.

The state could also eliminate some optional coverage, but Mr. Reinhart noted among the more costly optional coverage is in-home long-term care, which he said has actually reduced costs, and pharmaceuticals. "You really couldn't have a modern medical system without pharmaceuticals," he said.

Medicaid is one area where the state's current economic climate has been an advantage. "The federal share is increasing because Michigan's economy is deteriorating relative to other states," Mr. Reinhart said. The federal government is now covering 58 percent of the state's Medicaid costs, up from 56 percent last year.

But he said changes proposed in President George W. Bush's federal budget would reduce what the state receives for Medicaid. "We're working very hard to convince Congress not to enact those changes," he said.

And he said the increased federal match has not cut into state costs, because caseload has increased along with the increases in unemployment. Except for a small decline in mid-2006, the Medicaid rolls have increased steadily since about the end of 2000.

Noting that he was on leave during the brief decline in cases, Mr. Reinhart joked there could be a solution to reducing costs: "You could get rid of me."

But committee members from both sides of the aisle praised Mr. Reinhart's administration of the program. "It's obvious that you run a pretty tight ship and the problems with administration aren't in your office," said Minority Vice Chair [Rep. Ed Gaffney](#) (R-Grosse Pointe Farms).

One federal change that could save some money on the budget is the requirement that recipients be legal residents. But Mr. Reinhart expected only a "modest" number of recipients would lose benefits in Michigan under that provision, which kicks in April 1.

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Article published Feb 16, 2007

EDITORIAL

Making abuse suspects wear GPS device could ease fears

Victims of domestic abuse often live in fear of being assaulted. While they might go to court to seek a personal protection order against their alleged attacker, they know that a piece of paper offers little real protection from violence.

So we're intrigued by a state lawmaker's idea that would allow Michigan judges to require persons charged with domestic violence to wear global positioning system (GPS) devices. If the suspect went too close to an alleged victim, the GPS device would alert that person that the suspect was nearby. Theoretically, this would provide a person with sufficient warning to alert law enforcement and seek safety.

State Rep. Bill Caul, R-Mount Pleasant, said he is planning to introduce such legislation. Caul said it could help prevent tragedies such as the recent homicide of an Isabella County woman. The woman had a personal protection order against her estranged husband, who was charged with beating and sexually assaulting her. While free on bond, authorities say the man fatally shot his wife.

Obviously, not every personal protection order would require a tethered GPS device to be worn. But we think it would be a good idea to give judges the discretion to require such action in situations where they deem it necessary.

As for cost of the system, Caul said the legislation he intends to introduce would order defendants to pay for it.

Massachusetts lawmakers recently passed legislation allowing judges to order GPS tracking cases where domestic abusers have violated existing restraining orders. But as the Isabella County case points out, even one violation can have tragic consequences.

We say allow judges to require such devices be worn in cases where they feel continued violence is a real possibility. It would be far more effective than a court order, and help ease the fears of victims of domestic violence.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

State hits road with appeal for migrant workers

Friday, February 16, 2007

By Federico Martinez

Gazette News Service

MUSKEGON -- ``Venga a Michigan!"

Michigan government officials hope that Spanish slogan, which in English means ``Come to Michigan," translates into more migrant farmworkers coming to the state this year to pick crops and fill other agricultural jobs.

The invitation is part of a promotional effort that Michigan's Department of Labor and Economic Growth is using to try to lure potential workers to the state, following a year when migrant- labor shortages left some farmers in the lurch at harvest time.

Several department officials last week visited nine sites throughout Texas to make their pitch. The annual trek targets towns with large Hispanic populations that also have high unemployment rates, officials said.

The goal was ``to promote Michigan agriculture and the various services available," Rick Olivarez, a state monitor advocate, said during the Michigan Interagency Migrant Services Committee Meeting held in Lansing this week. The meeting was attended by two dozen representatives from various social-service agencies.

``We met with about 400 to 500 families," said Olivarez, who shared highlights from the trip. ``I think it was received well."

Michigan officials took with them a short video that highlights the kinds of jobs, housing, education and health services available in Michigan. The video is narrated in Spanish by several migrant workers. State officials are planning a similar recruiting trip to Florida later this winter.

Agriculture is the second-largest industry in Michigan. According to state census estimates, approximately 90,000 migrant laborers -- including their families -- come to Michigan each year.

But state officials want to avoid a repeat of last year when some employers had difficulty finding enough migrant workers, Olivarez said.

There were various reasons for the shortages -- a problem that wasn't widespread but occurred enough times to cause some alarm, Olivarez said.

Many potential migrant workers went instead to Louisiana for better-paying construction jobs created in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, he said. Others may have been scared off because they feared being caught by immigration-enforcement officials. Michigan's always unpredictable weather also caused some crop seasons to arrive and finish early, prompting many migrants to leave before other crops came in.

Migrant advocates attending Tuesday's meeting expressed mixed feelings about the promotional effort. Some felt the video painted a too-rose-tinted view of housing, jobs and social services available to migrants in Michigan.

``Aren't we kind of doing a `Yes, Michigan is a wonderful place to come to'? But we do have a lot of housing problems," said Juan Cruz, a farm-labor-housing specialist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Martha Gonzalez-Cortes, director of Michigan's Office of Migrant Affairs, also expressed concern that the

video is ``misleading people that we have housing everywhere."

The opposite is actually true, said Gonzalez-Cortes, who also expressed some concern about migrant housing conditions.

In December, the U.S. Department of Labor announced that farms and agricultural processing plants in 14 Michigan counties were fined for substandard housing and employment violations in 2006. Employment violations included children as young as 7 working in fields, and failure by some employers to pay minimum wage and overtime.

Violations occurred in Allegan, Van Buren and Kent counties, among others, according to a press release issued by the U.S. Department of Labor in December.

Olivarez said his department's promotional video and recruiting efforts shouldn't be construed as ignoring existing problems. Those problems need to be addressed if Michigan is going to continue to be viewed as a welcoming environment for migrants, he said.

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Looking for a little help: More Michigan families than ever getting food aid

By KURT HAUGLIE, DMG Writer

HOUGHTON — There are more people receiving state food aid in Michigan now, including in the Copper Country, than at anytime in the 40-year history of the program.

According to information provided by the Michigan Department of Human Services, the number of households and individuals receiving food assistance from the state generally increased in 2005 and 2006 in Baraga, Houghton, Keweenaw and Ontonagon counties.

There are more than one million residents receiving food aid from the state, and Maureen Sorbet, DHS spokeswoman, said although the increase in aid to families in the Lower Peninsula can be linked to the layoffs and downturn in the automobile industry, the reason for the increase in food aid in the Upper Peninsula is due to the generally poor economy in Michigan.

"The economic situation in the state is the same if you're downstate or upstate," Sorbet said.

The number of people receiving food aid from private organizations, such as churches, soup kitchens and community food banks, is also at about one million, according to the Food Bank Council of Michigan.

John Arnold, executive director of Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank of West Michigan in the Grand Rapids suburb of Comstock Park, said that organization supplies food to food banks in the western third of the Lower Peninsula and all of the Upper Peninsula, including the Community Action Agency based in Houghton.

Arnold said the increase in people using food banks has gone on much longer than the current need caused by the state's poor economy.

"In 21 of the last 25 years, the amount of food we have handled has increased," he said.

That increase is not necessarily because of an increase in either the supply of food or in demand for it, Arnold said, but more a function of distribution systems.

"The big driver is the willingness of local churches and charity agencies to take and dispense the food," he said.

Arnold said as those churches and agencies gain and lose personnel to do the distribution, the amount of food distributed can fluctuate.

Need for food for people unable to purchase all they need in a particular area is determined by a formula developed in the 1990s, Arnold said.

In Baraga County, it's been determined 272,000 pounds per year is needed but in 2005, only 113,000 pounds were drawn, and in 2006, only 122,000 pounds were drawn.

In Houghton County, it's estimated 1.264 million pounds are needed, but in 2005, only 417,000 pounds were drawn and in 2006, 315,000 pounds were drawn. In Keweenaw County, the estimated need is almost 61,000, and in 2005, about 22,000 pounds were drawn and in 2006, about 11,000 pounds were drawn.

Although there has been a recent increase in individuals and families seeking food aid, Arnold said it's not certain yet how much that increase is.

"Throughout western Michigan and the Upper Peninsula, the need has gotten greater," he said. "It's hard to put a number on it."



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Walk to help others stay warm

Friday, February 16, 2007

By Hannah McKinney

As we endure the coldest part of a Kalamazoo winter, all of us can tell that the cost of staying warm has increased in recent years.

For many of us, we can adjust our budgets and continue to keep our homes as warm as we want. But for far too many people in our community, these increases in cost lead to hard choices among warmth, food, medicine and other essentials.

Walk for Warmth is one effort to help those most vulnerable get through the winter without undue hardship. Walk for Warmth is a countywide effort to provide emergency assistance to help pay energy bills for those in need -- seniors, people with disabilities, single parents, the working poor. Walk for Warmth is the funding of last resort after all other resources have been exhausted.

For 14 years, Walk for Warmth has been an annual activity of the Kalamazoo County Community Action Agency. CAA calls upon many community partners -- organizations, service groups, public agencies and many, many, big-hearted individuals to raise the money that helps our friends and neighbors stay warm in the winter.

In the last 13 years, more than \$120,000 has been raised in donations to Walk for Warmth to help more than 250 families with up to \$500 to pay for heating. Last year, participants in the Walk for Warmth raised more than \$22,000. CAA then contacted the Michigan Community Action Agency for matching funds so that, in total, last year's Walk raised \$36,197.

This year's Walk for Warmth will take place on Saturday. Your donation is tax-deductible and checks can be made payable to WALK FOR WARMTH and mailed to 3299 Gull Road, 2nd Wing/3rd Floor, Kalamazoo, MI 49048. For more information, call Kalamazoo County CAA at

373-5066.

Please consider helping out. As this year's chairwoman for the Walk for Warmth committee, I challenge every resident of Kalamazoo County to find a way to support this worthwhile cause.

Hannah McKinney is mayor of Kalamazoo and committee chairwoman for Walk for Warmth.

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Friday, February 16, 2007

Detroit News

Wayne Briefs

Taylor: Arab community, group back dad

Members of the Arab-American community, along with the Parents for Children advocacy group, are expected to gather at 2:30 p.m. today in front of the Department of Human Services office in Taylor in support of Abraham Ben-Abbad, 38. The Dearborn man filed a lawsuit claiming the agency is depriving him of visitation rights with his 13-year-old daughter, especially during Muslim holidays. Ben-Abbad's suit also targets his former wife.

Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

Contact: Maureen Sorbet or Karen Stock (517) 373-7394

First Gentleman: Great dads are involved in kids' lives

Keynote address honors Responsible Fatherhood Awareness Month

February 16, 2007

LANSING – Michigan's First Gentleman Dan Mulhern today said the best investment fathers can make in their children's lives is to be involved in their children's daily activities.

Mulhern spoke at an open house showcasing fatherhood programming across the state in honor of Responsible Fatherhood Awareness Month.

"Good dads are involved dads," Mulhern said. "As fathers, the best contribution we can make to our children is time – being present in their lives day in and day out."

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm proclaimed February as Responsible Fatherhood Awareness Month to highlight to the critical role that fathers play in their children's lives.

Through the Proud Fathers-Proud Parents program, the Department of Human Services (DHS) provides funds for community agencies to deliver programming about responsible male parenting and other services designed to promote healthy marriages and co-parenting efforts. The program will disburse about \$1 million in federal TANF funds in fiscal year 2007 to 22 counties. The agencies were invited to use the open house to showcase their programs and make more people aware of the learning opportunities in their communities.

"Fathers provide a critical influence in their children's lives," DHS Director Marianne Udow said. "Outcomes for children are greatly improved with an active, involved father. Whether parents live together or not, they are connected by their concern and care for their children."

Proud Fathers provides 14 weeks of group-based instruction for fathers or other male caregivers of children who qualify for TANF services. Proud Parents offers a 10-week, group-based program designed for married or unmarried couples. Both programs stress the importance of nurturing relationships between parents and children as well as family self-

sufficiency. In 2006, 297 parents in 19 counties participated in the two programs.

“Children with involved parents are healthier, succeed in school, and become involved parents themselves,” said Duane Wilson, the Proud Fathers-Proud Parents program coordinator. “Our programs help men find healthy, positive ways to interact with their children and become the best dads they can be.”

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs